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SUBJECT: ZAM ON ZIM: RESIGNED BUT REALISTIC

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Booth for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Zambian Government (GRZ) officials and civil society representatives are supportive of the new Zimbabwean government of national unity, although they have shared concerns about its prospects for success. Their disapproval of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's undemocratic conduct appears to be counterbalanced by an equal lack of confidence in Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's leadership ability. Numerous Embassy interlocutors believe that the Zimbabwean power-sharing arrangement allows Mugabe the opportunity to step down from office while saving face, something that they consider likely within the next twelve months. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On February 12, Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary Tens Kapoma and Zambia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Lazarous Kapambwe sardonically described the agreement between Mugabe and Tsvangirai as a "forced marriage," with former South African President Thabo Mbeki acting as "the bridesmaid," and with uncertain prospects for success. Their misgivings aside, they appeared content -- even relieved -- with the arrangement, particularly as this would allow SADC to begin focusing on other issues. The DCM acknowledged the GRZ's contribution in SADC fora and encouraged SADC to continue monitoring the implementation of the agreement to ensure its success. The GRZ officials in turn thanked the U.S. Embassy for abiding by former President Mwanawasa's appeal to avoid making pointed public statements on Zimbabwe in the Zambian press, something they felt would have played into Mugabe's hands by making Mwanawasa appear to be a pawn of western governments.

¶3. (C) Kapoma conceded that the power-sharing arrangement provides Mugabe with an opportunity to retire from politics on his own accord and not at the bequest of the international community, a course of action that Mugabe might easily take within the next 12 months. In a separate meeting, COMESA Secretary General also made this point to the Ambassador, relaying that Mugabe was interested in an exit strategy that might be made complete with assurances of prosecutorial immunity from the United Kingdom and United States. An Indo-Kenyan business mogul with alleged ties to Mugabe also conveyed to the DCM that Mugabe would like to step down from office within the next six to nine months. He opined that Tsvangirai's political career -- despite Tsvangirai's political ambitions -- may also be in its final stages and that it was highly improbable that Tsvangirai would head the next Zimbabwean government.

¶4. (C) Zambian civil society representatives appear to be similarly supportive of the new Zimbabwean government, but equally doubtful about its chances for success. In the lead-up to the power-sharing agreement, numerous civil society leaders expressed to the DCM their exasperation with Tsvangirai, whom they considered inflexible, self-serving, and arrogant, and lacking in judgment and integrity. Their displeasure with Mugabe was matched -- if not surpassed -- by their disdain for Tsvangirai. They thought Tsvangirai should have already entered into a government of national unity that would allow the Zimbabwean government to begin restoring

stability to the country. Surprisingly, they were not overly concerned about ZANU-PF's record of human rights abuse as they felt that MDC had also committed injustices. The civil society leaders heaped additional criticism on Tsvangirai for his profuse international travel, which they thought signaled a stronger allegiance to foreign governments than to the Zimbabwean electorate.

15. (C) Comment. In the course of one year, Zambian public opinion appears to have swayed from umbrage (at Mugabe) to scorn (for Tsvangirai). Zambian insistence that any agreement is better than no agreement at all conveys a realpolitik defined by "African" norms and realities that cast a more forgiving light on Mugabe's tyranny than on Tsvangirai's apparent futility. A regrettably large number of Zambians appear to believe that the USG has extended widespread economic sanctions on Zimbabwe and therefore has played a role in Zimbabwe's economic collapse. Consequently, there seems to be an unfound optimism that the power-sharing agreement will result in economic recovery directly following the revocation of these non-existent sanctions. Despite our public diplomacy efforts, they are also woefully unaware of U.S. humanitarian assistance to the Zimbabwean people. Either way, the GRZ appears well-disposed to the softening of rhetoric in Washington and USG's willingness to give the power-sharing agreement (that Zambians themselves have little confidence in) a chance.

BOOTH